



EPISODE 2x13 “THE BREATHING”

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Directed by DC Washington

Selected scenes & text from the R. Tam Sessions, Shooting Script, and
Extended Draft of the “Serenity” Motion Picture by Joss Whedon

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Previously on Firefly...

2x11 (*Lilac*) – INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE

Inara and the stranger share the moment, then it passes, and they go back to their preparations.

MAN

You didn't mention your name.

INARA

It's Inara. Inara Serra. And yours?

MAN

I'm Jude. Pleased to meet you, Inara.

2x11/12 (*Lilac/Pull the Trigger*) – INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE

SHEYDRA

He told me that you met in the kitchen. I think he has his eye on you.

INARA

I'm not taking clients now. I'm teaching. You know that.

SHEYDRA

Inara, you are a strong woman. Stronger than me. You are ready to move on.

2x11 (*Lilac*) – INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE

JUDE

One must acquire many stories, travelling on such a ship.

INARA

I've got my share.

JUDE

You should tell me sometime. Perhaps over dinner.

INARA

Are you looking to contract my services, because Sheydra—

JUDE

No.

(beat)
I was asking you to dinner.

1x02 (*Serenity pt II*) – INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD

The top of the futuristic box flies off, clattering to the floor as the smoke clears from over what's inside. River.

SIMON (VO)
Everything she did, music, math, theoretical physics - even dance - there was nothing that didn't come as naturally to her as breathing does to us.



1x03 (*The Train Job*) – INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

Flashbacks of River getting needles stuck into her head.

SIMON (VO)
There was a school... a, uh, government-sponsored academy... She was fourteen.



1x10 (*Ariel*) – INT. ST LUCY'S HOSPITAL - IMAGING ROOM

Simon manipulates the holographic scan of River's brain.

SIMON (VO)
I was contacted by some men, some underground movement. They said she was in danger, that the government was playing with her brain. I don't know what they did to her, or why.



1x06 (*Safe*) – INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA

RIVER
You can't just dig into me, shove point needles in my eyes and ask me what I see!



1x11 (*War Stories*) – INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

SIMON
The more I see, the more I think their purpose was very specific. Whatever they were doing, they were close to succeeding.



2x03 (*Salvage*) - INT. SHUTTLE ONE

RIVER

Everything sleeps. It sleeps and sleeps and sleeps until we wake it up.

2x12 (*Pull the Trigger*) – INT. THE MAIDENHEAD

River is hypnotised by the Oaty Bar commercial on the CorVue. All noise but the jingle fades out, finally that as well, just the hum in River's ears.

RIVER

Miranda.



CUT TO: River, taking out the patrons of the Maidenhead.

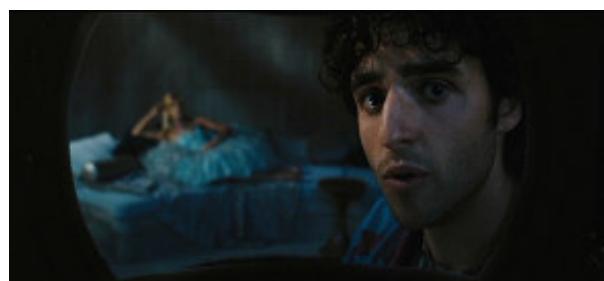
PULL BACK to see Mr. Universe watching the security feed on-screen and talking to Mal via Wave.

MAL (via Wave)

Subliminal. It's a subliminal message broadwaved to trigger her.

MR. UNIVERSE

It's Alliance and it's high military. Someone has gone to enormous trouble to find your little friend... Do you all know what it is you're carrying?



INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE - NIGHT

MAL, WASH, and ZOE huddle together, staring at the CorVue feed from the Maidenhead. We get the feeling this is the near-hundredth time.

RIVER (on the monitor)

Miranda.

MAL

Miranda. Never even met the miss and I'm already sick of her. How can one girl be this much headache?

WASH

Uh, have you met River Tam?

MAL

Point taken.

ZOE

Don't know who or what she is, but she's on River's mind. Must be important. Conjure it might be the reason they're after her.

MAL

You mean 'after us'.

ZOE

After us.

WASH

Okay. Great... So what do we do about it?

MAL

(points at the forward viewport)
See that patch of nothing way out there next to that big piece of black, Wash? Keep on flying straight at it.

WASH

We can't keep this up, Mal! Even coasting like we've been the last few days, we're gonna run out of fuel before long.

MAL

She's too much a danger... We just can't walk a loaded gun into a friend's house.

ZOE

Can't keep circling the same sky 'til old age solves the problem for us, either, sir.

MAL
(reluctant, sighs)
Make for Haven. Bern'll fuel us up while we figure out our next step... She don't leave Serenity. Bernabe don't need to know who... what she is.

ZOE
Just like Simon figured you didn't need to know?

Zoe's persistent stare is thankfully interrupted by the MONITOR – flashing "INCOMING."

WASH
You got a Wave, Mal.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP: RIVER lies on the grated floor, one hand cuffed to it. Sweating and shivering both at once, she holds herself close in the dark space.

She stares at us, impassive, as the CAMERA PULLS AWAY from her to reveal SIMON, wearing a BRIGHT HAWAIIAN SHIRT, who holds up some food on a spoon.

RIVER
They're afraid of me.

SIMON
I'm sorry...

RIVER
They should be. What I will show them... Oh God...

She starts tearing up, breathing faster... Simon runs his hands through her hair.

SIMON
It's okay, it's okay...

RIVER
(somewhere else)
Show me off like a dog, old men covered in blood, it never touched them but they're drowning in it... so much loss...
(beat, more tears)
I don't know what I'm saying. I never know what I'm saying!

SIMON
In the Maidenhead, you said something. When you were triggered, do you remember? The captain saw you say something on the feed...

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal sits in the co-pilot's chair, staring at the monitor. It's River, once more. Wash and Zoe stand behind.

RIVER (on the monitor)
Miranda.

The monitor fast-forwards through the fighting in the bar, and pauses as Mal lifts an unconscious River into his arms.

The view on the monitor then pulls back, showing FANTY, who was holding a smaller CorVue to the Wave-screen.

FANTY (via Wave)
Your little princess did quite a number to our home,
Malcolm.

MAL
Now is not the best time, Fanty. What is it you want?

FANTY (via Wave)
Don't think you heard me.
(gets closer)
Our. Home. One of your own drags dirt over our doorstep
and you leave without so much as a 'so long'.

MAL
I am truly sorry. How thoughtless... So long.

He cuts off the Wave, sits back in the chair, and breathes deep.

The screen flashes again – "INCOMING."

ZOE
Jian chi chna chu <Persistent toad>.

Mal punches a button and Fanty is back.

FANTY (via Wave)
And then there's your arrogance – thinking you can just
pick up your heels and leave us to clean up your mess.

MAL
I had to run. If—

FANTY (via Wave)
Feds were crawlin' through this place like they lost the
Parliament under a bottlecap. Caused a hell of mess. A
mess which you are going to pay for.

MAL
Ain't got much to give you, Fenty.

FANTY (via Wave)
You're in luck we've such... forgiving natures.

WASH
I don't remember apologizing.

MAL
Thanks all the same.

FANTY (via Wave)
(sigh)
I'll make this simple for you. We take the liberty on sixty percent of your next job, which is going to happen right this very now. Am I being crystal here?

Mal says nothing. Grinds his teeth.

FANTY (via Wave, cont'd)
You will meet with our contact on Dytون, he'll be—

Mal nods to Wash, who begins shifting dials at the pilot's console. The screen fills with static and begins cutting out.

MAL
Sorry Fenty ol' boy. Seem to be picking up some interf—

Mal cuts the Wave off once again.

INT. BEAUMONDE – MINGO & FANTY'S OFFICE – SAME TIME

CLOSE-UP: Fenty, as he throws the Wave-board down in frustration, and turns around.

FANTY
Told you he wouldn't go for it.

PULL BACK: He's talking to MINGO. A SWORD is held to Mingo's neck by a MAN IN SILHOUETTE. We cannot see his face, but we can see the man is wearing GLASSES that reflect the faint light. Despite this, Mingo has a sly grin on his face.

MINGO
We did what you asked. Now you can do us a favor. Pony up the cash you promised, then get the hell out.

GLASSES MAN (OS)
Do you know what your sin is, Mister Holden?

MINGO
(the grin suddenly fades)
My-? Hey, t'ain't our fault his gorram troubles landed on
our doorstep!

The sword edges with just enough pressure to draw the first sign of blood.

FANTY
Please...

GLASSES MAN (OS)
It's greed.

The sword flickers in the light as it makes one sudden, careful motion.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER – SAME TIME

Simon edges closer to River.

SIMON
Miranda?

RIVER
(laughs bitterly)
Ask her. She'll show you all.

SIMON
Show us what? Who is Miranda?

River points up.

SIMON (cont'd)
(hesitant, this sounds stupid)
Am I... talking to Miranda now?

She shoots him a look.

SIMON
No. Right. But I think somehow when they triggered you it
brought this up, this memory.

RIVER
It isn't mine. The memory. I didn't bring it and I shouldn't
have to carry it, it isn't mine.
(urgently)
Don't make me sleep again!

SIMON
I won't.

FLASHCUT: River suddenly puts a gun to her head.

RIVER (VO)
Put a bullet to me. Bullet in the brain-pan, squish.

FLASHCUT: Back to reality.

SIMON
Don't say that. Not ever. We'll get through this.

She reaches out and touches his face affectionately.

RIVER
Things are going to get much much worse.

SIMON
Well, the captain hasn't tossed us in the airlock so I'd say we're-

RIVER
He has to see. More than anyone... he has to see what he doesn't want to.

SIMON
River. What will Miranda show us?

INT. BEAUMONDE – MINGO & FANTY'S OFFICE – SAME TIME

Two heads and their respective torsos lie in pools of dark blood. The entire office in flames.

RIVER (VO)
Death.

SIMON (VO)
Whose death?

INT. SERENITY - STORAGE LOCKER – SAME TIME

An eerily silent beat between River and Simon, then

FAST FLASHCUTS: Dead and decaying BODIES in overexposed light, with SOUNDS of flies buzzing. More bodies. Then – a Reaver!

River starts laughing. Quietly at first, then louder, then almost uncontrollably, screaming in his face:

RIVER
EVERYBODY'S!!!

SMASH CUT TO: Black silence.

EXT. HAVEN – MINING CAMP – SUNSET – ESTABLISHING

Serenity is parked between the cannon mount (from 1x16 “The Big Stick”) and a ragged vegetable garden as the reflection of the sunset plays off the bridge window. We hear the distant sound of much laughing—

INT. HAVEN - CAMP TENT – COMMUNITY KITCHEN

—which is now very loud. The gang sans Mal, Book, Simon and River, are at a table, sitting and eating. JAYNE has a cigar in his mouth (while trying to eat at the same time). Zoe chats with BERNABE and MILLIE. Wash and Ben clink cups, drinking. KAYLEE hoists HIROKU onto her lap and kisses his head.

KAYLEE
So how's my boyfriend?

Hiroku shrugs.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Not a single Wave the whole time I'm gone! I forgive you.
When are we getting married?

HIROKU
Micklemass.

KAYLEE
I can't wait that long! You gotta make an honest woman
of me so I can kiss your big ol' head!

Wash suddenly falls off his chair, hitting the floor. Ben laughs hysterically, then falls too.

WASH
This potato wine is the devil's own brew.

Zoe gets up, and hoists Wash up off the floor. Wash leans against her for support.

ZOE
Alcohol. Great idea, Bern.

BERNABE
What's a party without a sixty percent pure buzz, huh?
Which makes me wonder... How come Mal's poopin' the
party? Never known him to turn down a cup!

Zoe looks at Kaylee. Kaylee looks at Zoe. Kaylee opens her mouth. No words come out.

EXT. HAVEN – MINING CAMP - SAME TIME

Mal and Book walk side by side in the fading light.

BOOK
It's good to see you again, Mal.

MAL
And you, Shepherd. And you.

BOOK
Which begs the question - where exactly are we going?
The party is back there.

They reach the top of a hill, and see Serenity in the distance.

MAL
May have noticed some folk 'missing' from the festivities.

BOOK
Yes. Where are they?

MAL
River can't leave the ship.

BOOK
What? Why?

MAL
'Cause she hasn't yet figured how to get out of handcuffs.

BOOK
Handc-!? I don't... why so cryptic?

MAL
Not so much fun on the receiving end of 'cryptic', is it?

BOOK
What happened, Mal?

INT. HAVEN - CAMP TENT – COMMUNITY KITCHEN – SAME TIME

MILLIE
Sick? Oh the poor dear! We'll bring her some of this broth.
Miracle cure for any and all malady.

ZOE
No... No it's fine. Doctor's got it all under his belt. Doesn't
want us disturb River's rest.

WASH

(oblivious to the serious conversation)

I can't feel my elbows. Is that a bad sign? Do I usually
feel my elbows? What is our sense of elbow?

KAYLEE

(quietly, to Jayne)

It's so sad...

JAYNE

Yeah, tear-squeezing tale-o-woe. Pass the beans.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER – MINUTES LATER

We see Mal and Book through the window, watching over the sleeping River. Mal opens the door. River awakens with a jolt.

Mal steps forward, crouches to River's height, and stares into her eyes.

RIVER

She's a puzzlement, that girl. Don't make no sense. 'Cept sometimes she does... If I gave her up, would that be an end to my woes?

(beat)

Is there any way out of this?

MAL

That is a hell of a parlour trick, darlin'. Should hire you out at parties.

RIVER

But we don't go to parties.

MAL

Well, I think we're missing out.

RIVER

Would I be able to kill this girl?

MAL

Okay, that's plenty of my brain, let's maybe spend some time inside your own. Do you know at all why they're after you with such a will?

RIVER

Miranda.

MAL

Your brother mentioned that. We none of us know what it means.

RIVER

Something else. Peace. Pax. I don't know. I'm afraid of it.

MAL

Well try to see it clearly if you can. My terrain's all fogged up here. I got no compass. Can you help?

RIVER

The more I remember, the harder they'll come.

Book leans down next to Mal.

BOOK

I expect that's the case, dear. But try. The less you remember, the less we can do about it...

River is silent. Mal, frustrated, gets up to leave.

RIVER

Captain...

He turns back.

RIVER (cont'd)

Don't lie down.

MAL

Um, okay. I'll...

He goes. Book follows, and Mal closes the door behind them, leaving her in the darkness. She looks down at her shackles.

RIVER

Mustn't ever lie down...

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

They step outside the door. Mal shuts it behind them. Simon sleeps beside it on the floor, curled into a position he's clearly going to regret in the morning.

BOOK

Don't you think we should wake him up?

Mal shrugs and pokes Simon with his boot. Simon doesn't react. He's out.

MAL

This's the first time he's shut an eye since we left Beaumonde. Let him be to dream none of this ever happened. And let me walk you back.

Book pulls a Bible out of his coat pocket and turns back to the storage locker.

BOOK

If you don't mind, I thought I might offer her some comfort.

MAL

(re: Bible)

From that?

BOOK

In point of fact, yes. There's some very compelling passages—

MAL

I remember them. Read her something from Job, that aughta get a laugh.

BOOK

Job never lost his faith.

MAL

Job got squirted on from the heavens and never had the brains to wear a hat. He ain't exactly a role model to me.

(starts to leave, stops)

I tell you, it wonders me, you having sailed with us all this time and you still turn to that Bible.

BOOK

More and more, actually.

MAL

You wanna comfort River, stand there and think happy thoughts. Like as not, she'll hear 'em.

BOOK

Funny.

MAL

Do you really think what that girl needs now is a shepherd? The cuddly word o' God?

BOOK

Right now? More than anything else, she needs you.

EXT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – DAY

INARA sits on a bench in a beautiful garden. She has a NOTEPAD balanced on her lap, and is sketching Chinese SYMBOLS with a CALLIGRAPHY PEN. Some students mingle through the garden, but they pay her no mind.

MALE VOICE (OS)

She writes with a pen.

Inara looks up to see JUDE standing over her, smiling kindly. She smiles in return.

INARA

Is it so surprising that a woman who does her own dishes would write with ink and instrument?

JUDE

(sitting down)

Not at all. The art reflects the artist. Beautiful. Though I must admit, I personally prefer the orderliness of keeping notes electronically.

INARA

Order in exchange for personal expression?

JUDE

Perhaps... if that order allowed for the seamless function that art could not possibly allow.

An uncomfortable beat. Then Jude smiles.

JUDE (cont'd)

But I am a Neanderthal unschooled in the appreciation of fine things. That is why I'm here, with you, after all. What are you writing, if it's not too private?

INARA

Not at all. Next week's lesson.

JUDE

Ah, yes. Sheydra did tell me you were a teacher. What course are you instructing?

INARA

I'm teaching two, actually. One on Guild history and Companion ritual, another on Companion artform – hence the calligraphy.

JUDE

I don't suppose you'd have time for another class?

INARA

Another...?

JUDE

The History of Inara Serra, to be taught tonight to a class of one, over dinner. I've taken the liberty of making reservations at *Chandrasekhar's*. I hope that is to your tastes.

INARA
It... sounds perfect.

They exchange a smile. Jude takes Inara's hand into his, kisses it, then stands to depart. Inara looks at her hand as he walks away, smile fading, replaced by a look of uncertainty.

INT. SERENITY – DINING AREA – LATER

Simon sleeps at Mal's feet, who stands, arms folded, as Book exits the storage locker. Book holds his hands in prayer.

BOOK
... Lord, forgive what you can, and send us on our path.
We will walk on, until you bid us rest.

MAL
Hope that ain't for me, Shepherd.

BOOK
It's a prayer for the dead.

MAL
Then I really hope it ain't for me.

BOOK
It's for the men River might have killed in that bar.

MAL
Weren't River that did it, you know that. Somebody decided her brain was just another piece of property to take. Fenced it right up.

BOOK
What was the word you used?

MAL
'Triggered'... Subliminal message hidden in the Cortex.

Book looks at Mal – very intrigued.

BOOK
Subliminal? Now that is interesting... You ever hear of the 'Hera Terror', Mal?

MAL
Fifteen bombings in two weeks. Government buildings, apartments. Schools...

BOOK
No-one was ever caught.

MAL
What're you sayin', Shepherd?

BOOK
They could never prove it, but several investigations by the old Hera government discovered a seemingly random signal in their Cortex over those two weeks.

MAL
And you think that this... this signal... was a trigger?
Subliminal?

Book doesn't answer. Just stares back at Mal.

MAL (cont'd)
Like River?

BOOK
All I know is you've stumbled across something far more than dangerous here...
(sighs)
A good few years before the war, the Alliance Parliament foresaw the coming conflict.

MAL
Easy to 'foresee' something if you're gonna be the one to start it.

BOOK
(ignoring)
They established a joint Military Command from all core planets, to organize their forces.

MAL
And MilCom built what became the Alliance military we all know an' love. Know my history, Shepherd.

BOOK
Here's something you won't know – MilCom not only gathered traditional troops and resources to form their army. They went into research and development to create new resources.
(beat)
More effective resources.

FLASHBACK – INT. BARE METAL ROOM

A rectangular room, all silver, furnished only by a black metallic CHAMBER with a one-way glass window, sitting in what seems to be the centre of the room. It seems to be the centre – because we don't see a far wall. Only blackness.

Stillness. Then the sound of deep, slow BREATHING.

BOOK (VO)
Experiments were conducted...

We PAN across the one-way glass, and look down into the chamber. A young woman lies, submerged in dark water, seemingly asleep.

BOOK (VO)
Now I wasn't privy to specifics, but what I did learn...

A light goes on inside the chamber.

BOOK (VO)
...was terrifying.

Eyes suddenly open.

BOOK (VO)
People were taken from their homes...

A series of lights flicker in sequence – revealing the room is actually an extremely long and narrow corridor, with one chamber every few meters.

BOOK (VO)
...never to be seen again.

FAST PAN across a dozen chambers, a FACE in each window – awake.

INT. SERENITY – DINING AREA

Mal stares at Book aghast.

BOOK
They called it 'Project Catechism'...

MAL
How—

BOOK
All I know.

Silence. Simon snorts, and stirs in his sleep. Book puts a finger to his lips, then starts walking.

EXT. HAVEN – MINING CAMP – NIGHT – MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Book step down the cargo hold ramp into the dim fire-lit night.

BOOK
You got a plan?

MAL
Hiding ain't a plan?

BOOK
It'll do you for a spell.

MAL
But the Alliance'll be coming. They're after this girl with a powerful will. I look to hear the tromp of their boots any moment.

BOOK
You won't.
(off Mal's look)

This isn't a palms up military run, Mal. No reports broadwaved, no warrants... much as they want her, they want her hid. That means closed file. Means an Operative, which is trouble you've not known.

MAL
I coulda left her there. I had an out – hell, I had every reason in the 'Verse to leave her lay and haul anchor.

BOOK
Not your way, Mal.

MAL
I have a way?
(thinks)
Is that better than a plan?

BOOK
You can play the thug all you want, but there's more to you than you're ever like to 'fess.

MAL
You think that just 'cause my eyes is so sorrowful and pretty.

BOOK
(smiles)
There is that possibility.
(beat)
There is... another possibility, if you'll hear me out...

Mal looks at him.

BOOK (cont'd)

Haven's drying up, Mal. We're almost out of the basics – food, water... Not sure we can hold our own bellies, never mind taking in strays. We sure could use a refill. Something like, oh, I don't know, "Alliance-stamped multi-nutritional ration-bars" from an old near-abandoned military base, perhaps.

MAL

(skeptical look)

Surely there's an easier, and less lead-attracting way to find a meal, Shepherd?

BOOK

The thing is... This blackbook project - Catechism...

(eye contact)

I know where it was.

Mal just stares at him, his mouth agape. Then he realises what Book is saying.

MAL

Oh no... No, no, no, and NO for emphasis. Risk my already-noosed neck like that? She ain't my blood. My responsibility.

BOOK

You don't believe that. You have a choice to make. No choice is ever easy, but this, this is a particular rub... Real choices are not between black or white, good or evil. Real choices are those you have to live with for the rest of your life. Those with complications on all forks. But it's still a choice. Your choice.

A long beat. Book refuses to break eye-contact. Mal sighs.

MAL

You say 'near-abandoned' military base?

BOOK

I believe you just made a choice.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – THE NEXT MORNING

Mal and Book stand at the head of the table, the rest of the crew are gathered round. There is some breakfast on the table – half eaten. Simon still sporting a Hawaiian Wash special.

SIMON

No we are NOT! You... You can't!

MAL
Can. Want to. Will.

SIMON
An Alliance military base!? I know I say this from-time-to-time-on-occasion-always, but have you both lost your minds!?

JAYNE
Captain don't take a man wearin' girly shirts serious.

WASH
Don't listen to him! You look sharp! A beast of fashion!

MAL
You done? Shepherd says this base... what did you call it?

BOOK
Khonsu.

MAL
... is all but dispeopled, and that's good enough for me.

BOOK
It's cold. No traffic in or out for months. At least none that normal scanners can detect.

WASH
Whew! Dunno about you guys, but I'll finally sleep at night.

SIMON
It's not worth the risk.

MAL
Okay, so, what? Let your darling sister live in cuffs the rest of her life?
(“considering” the possibility)
Hey - she could raise a whole gaggle of pasty closet-children. Never did much use that storage locker...

SIMON
Ya zha nin <Screw you>!

MAL
If there's another soul willing to bare your burden then just point Wash in a direction and we'll gladly send you a postcard...
(off Simon's blank look)

Didn't think so. Now, I turned the other cheek with you, doctor. And Jayne here, he turned the other, uh, testicle, with your sister. Don't expect such charitable ways to last.

JAYNE

That's for abso-ruttin'-surely.

MAL

So the bullet is - you will go where I damn well say so.

Simon angrily pushes his chair back and storms out the room into the aft passage. Mal starts to pursue, but Book holds his arm out to stop him.

BOOK

Let me go.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – MOMENTS LATER

Simon stands with his back to the door, filling a needle with a drug when he looks up - sees Book's REFLECTION in the glass cabinet.

SIMON

(fuming)

It appears *wo de di ren de di ren shi wo de di ren* <the enemy of my enemy is my enemy>...

BOOK

Son, you know we want to help her as much as you do.

SIMON

Do I?

BOOK

It appears the Alliance want River something fierce. Best chance of us all breathing come day's end is to find out why. And this base may hold those answers.

SIMON

You'll forgive me for asking how in <a cow's lonely colon> a shepherd would know of such bases?

BOOK

You'd be amazed what men speak of in the confessional.

Simon squirts some fluid from the syringe he just filled.

SIMON

I'm sure I would.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

JAYNE

Hate to be in agreement with that moron, Mal, but an Alliance base!? I likes my pulse where it is.

ZOE

(softly to Mal)

He ain't wrong sir. Smells jokey.

MAL

Look – let me do you all the math – no food, Haven can't take us. No hiding, Alliance catches us. They catch us...

(angry pause)

Way I see it, we got us a dandy of a choice. A difficult choice, but one as had to be made.

CLOSEUP: Mal's brooding face.

MAL (cont'd)

Find some gorram food, and maybe at the same time go a ways to helping the Little Serial Killer out of our pantry... or write your own gorram eulogy right now.

A quiet beat as his words echo.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Simon still stands with his back to Book, refusing to face him.

SIMON

It just... it all seems so useless. Us running. I thought we were past all this... Now it feels like there's no place in this whole *hu che kong* <accursed> 'Verse we can go where they can't reach us.

BOOK

And that's why you have to go to Khonsu, son. I know you will do whatever you have to, to keep River safe.

(beat)

And I know Mal will, too.

SIMON

Including wrapping her up and putting her on the Alliance's doorstep?

BOOK

Including. And I'm willing to bet you'll find something on that very doorstep to explain what they did to her. Something that may help her get better. And that should be all the reason you'll ever need...

Simon finally turns around, but Book is gone. A small YELLOW PIECE OF PAPER lies on the bed. Simon picks it up.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

MAL

I ain't loving the concept on my boat of late that y'all think the air in those lungs is worth a damn. This ain't no democracy! You think I never thought this through? The risks?

(steps forward, dark and scary)

You all best remember: here, I am not the final word. I'm the only—

SIMON (OS)

We're going.

Simon stands in the doorway. A beat.

MAL

(lamely to himself)

Word...

Book comes up behind Simon.

BOOK

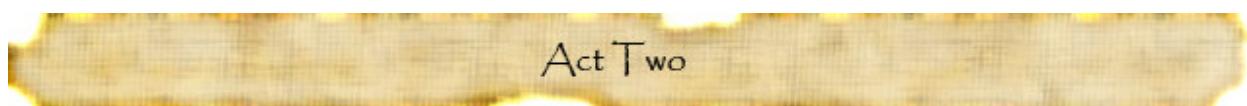
(a hand on Simon's shoulder)

God speed, son.

MAL

Hard burn'll do just fine, Shepherd.

Book smiles.



Act Two

EXT. HAVEN

Serenity sails out Haven's atmosphere, and into the black.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – LATER

Mal goes inside the room, and starts helping himself to an INNOCULATION. As he rolls up his sleeve—

SIMON (OS)

You know, that's my job.

MAL
Seems you ain't too interested in helping me of late.

Simon takes the syringe from Mal and injects him.

SIMON
I know you know this, but you need to hear the words.
(eye contact)
She's all I have.
(beat)
Sometimes... I can't remember my sister. The girl she
used to be before... I try to picture this glowing, vibrant
energy, but it doesn't come. I have to come to terms with
the fact that that River is gone. Forever. But she is still all
I have, and I am all she has.

Uncomfortable beat. Mal doesn't know what to say. Finally—

MAL
That ain't true. How's she doing?

SIMON
(glaring)
Still chained to the floor like an animal.

Simon pauses, controls his anger.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER – SAME TIME

River lies on the floor. Shivering.

SIMON (cont'd, VO)
She's... breathing. Just a terrified breathing shell - afraid
of herself more than anything.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

SIMON (cont'd)
Being chained is not helping matters, though.

MAL
I loose her, you undertake she ain't gonna tear a new
door in my hold?

SIMON
I... Yes. As long as she is not triggered again.

MAL
Best you keep her away from Oaty Bars then.

(thinks)
Alright. But here are my terms – one, she stays cuffed.

SIMON
...Fine.

MAL
Two, you watch her the entire-even-in-the-little-girls-room time.

Simon nods in agreement.

MAL (cont'd)
Three, and here's the dealbreaker, Jayne gets to hold a barrel to her brain the entire-even-in-the-shower time.

SIMON
Wha— No! No way. Not with that itchy trigger finger of—

MAL
That very itchy trigger finger'd be enough to make sure you hold her to the straight and no-killing-narrow. No Jayne, no deal.

Simon tries to stare Mal down as he thinks, but then reluctantly puts out his hand to shake.

SIMON
You are a real <piece of bastard>, you know that? I only hope that one day you'll be able to care about someone other than almighty you.

Mal shakes his hand with a smile. He leaves a KEY in Simon's hand, then walks off. Simon looks down – sees his bright clothing. Remembers something. As Mal gets to the door-

SIMON (cont'd)
Oh, and, uh... Captain? Can I... maybe borrow a shirt?

EXT. BENA – Chandrasekhar's RESTAURANT – EVENING – ESTABLISHING

Chandrasekhar's is an old world wooden fronted restaurant. All candle light and sprawling ivy.

INT. BENA – CHANDRASEKHAR'S RESTAURANT – EVENING

Inara and Jude sit across from each other at a small, intimate table lit by candlelight. Inara's hair is pulled back. She's all smiles. Jude is slightly more

reserved, but still warm, clearly enjoying her company. Their plates are empty. They've been here a while.

INARA

Slapping him, I admit, was a bit... unprofessional of me.

JUDE

But you enjoyed it?

She hesitates, then smiles.

INARA

I don't think I'll be slapping wayward spaceship captains again anytime soon, if that's what you mean.

JUDE

And where did you say this was again?

INARA

It happened on Paradiso, a town on Regina. It's... small, but quaint in its own way. I sometimes forget that there are places that are not accustomed to registered Companions walking about. I'm afraid I caused quite a commotion.

JUDE

Yes, I do find it hard to fathom. Backwater moons, uncivilized worlds...

INARA

I used to think 'uncivilized' was the term to use. Now I don't know, Jude. Their customs may be different, but in the end, I think we all want the same thing: to live life in our own way.

JUDE

And yet, I must call any world that has not born witness to your beauty 'uncivilized.' Forgive me.

INARA

You do well at making me blush.

JUDE

No, it is you who makes me blush. The places you've been, Inara, the people you've met along the way... You must tell me more.

(leans forward, smiles)

Tell me everything...

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – LATER

Jayne is at the table with a CUP OF COFFEE. The door opens, and River – cuffed with her hands out front - walks in. Jayne gets a big fright, and pulls out his big KNIFE, Pinky.

JAYNE
Kao! How in Hades you get loose?

Simon (now in one of Mal's red-brown shirts) follows suit, catching up to River.

SIMON
(pointing at the knife)
You won't need that.

JAYNE
I might.

River walks slowly towards Jayne, staring at him.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Don't you come—uh...
(trying to remember the words)
Eating... coal... nose... mucous!

River gives him the '*what planet are you from?*' look, then reaches forward.

Jayne jumps backwards covering his crotch - SPILLING his coffee on his pants. River takes the cup from Jayne's hand. Takes a sip.

RIVER
Sorry. About your gonads.

EXT. SPACE – ESTABLISHING

Serenity arrives at a desolately grey PLANET and circles around to its only MOON.

The moon appears almost black against the planet, perpetually shielded from the light of the system's sun. A moon in permanent shadow.

Serenity's blue thrusters burn the only light through the moon's black atmosphere.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash flies, Mal and Zoe behind him. Through the forward viewport, they see a STRUCTURE approaching in the distance.

ZOE
There it is. Just where Shepherd said it would be.

WASH
Was kinda hoping the good preacher'd be wrong on this one.

MAL
Keep her low, Wash. Rather be a blip than a bleep if anyone's lookin' too closely at a scanner.

WASH
And the difference is...?

Mal tries to think up an answer.

MAL
Less vowels...
(softly to himself)
Hate vowels.

EXT. KHONSU – ESTABLISHING – SAME TIME - NIGHT

Serenity flies so low over dark water that the engine thrust creates a speedboat-like wake behind her.

The rectangular structure gets closer. We can see detail. It is a large warehouse-like building, near the coastline. Landing pads surround it. There is no activity and no lights.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Jayne strides onto the bridge with Vera slung on his shoulder.

WASH
(nod toward Jayne's wet pants)
Have a little accident there, big man?

JAYNE
Keep lookin' and you might.

MAL
(to Zoe)
Still smell something?

ZOE
(looks at a monitor)
No heat. No lights, no ships. No energy readings at all.
Looks clean, sir. Seems my sense of smell ain't what it used to be.

JAYNE

(loads a clip onto Vera)

Just 'cause a chicken got wings don't mean it can fly.

WASH

(looks at Jayne, confused)

Huh?

MAL

Sure ain't like the Alliance to abandon anything.

ZOE

(staring out the window, surprised)

Not sure this is the Alliance military anymore.

WASH

What... other military is there?

EXT. KHONSU – SAME TIME

Serenity swoops over the top of the base, which has a BLUE SUN LOGO on its roof.

WASH (VO)

What in <grandmomma's moustache trimming hell> is—!?

MAL (VO)

Wash - wanna try Shepherd's codes?

Two massive side-doors open up, revealing the structure's inner darkness.

Then a light goes on inside.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash looks at Mal. Mal looks at Wash.

WASH

That man is either God's own prophet—

MAL

Or something else... Take us all the way in, Wash. Get her as close inside those doors as she can fit.

Mal starts to walk out. As he gets to the door:

MAL (cont'd)

Projector ready?

WASH

Yeah... but Mal—

MAL

And remember to switch round the thrusters' gas valves
like we talked about.

WASH

You sure this is... the right thing to do here, Mal?

Mal looks at Wash – about to say something but then stops. A pain on his face says he's not sure at all. He is clearly torn. Without answering, he walks out.

EXT. KHONSU – SAME TIME

Serenity lands at the entrance to the base, half inside the giant doors.

INT. KHONSU - BASE - MOMENTS LATER

Jayne, Zoe, Kaylee and Simon tentatively exit Serenity. Those that carry have their weapons ready in their hands. River, terrified and handcuffed, holds onto the bay doors for dear life. Mal tries to peel her off.

MAL

C'mon, little one.

RIVER

This is where they come when you're not hearing and
make you hear. Don't speak. Don't say a word. Just be
one of the breathing!

SIMON

She should be on the ship.

MAL

You're the one wanted her loose, doc, and I'd prefer to
keep an eye on her over leavin' her alone with my one
and only pilot... Less, of course, you'd like her back in her
cupboard?

(off Simon's defeated look)

'Sides, she's a part of this. May see something we don't.

Simon manages to coax River out the hold. She holds him tightly for support as they step deeper inside the base.

Which isn't a base at all. Filled to the roof are CRATES of BLUE SUN COLA.

JAYNE

Looks like we found a top secret stash of top secret pop,
Mal. Good job.

KAYLEE

This don't look like no secret base.

Jayne breaks open a crate, pulls out a BOTTLE, and starts drinking.

JAYNE

Really now?

(swig, wipes his mouth)

Aah. I think the secret's the fresh cola-ry taste.

ZOE

Then how come Shepherd's codes still work?

That silences everyone for a beat.

MAL

Keep your toes warm people. Stay together.

River clings onto Simon, refusing to take another step. She POINTS at the bare metal WALL in front of her.

RIVER

(scared, confused, shouting)

Cold. They're all cold. Breathing but not 'cause they want to. Can't... **keep them from breathing in me!**

JAYNE

Doc, how about you keep flannelmouth's leash tight 'fore I muzzle her myself?

Simon hugs River close, and gives Jayne the evil eye. Jayne takes another large swig of cola. Kaylee walks past them both towards the wall River is pointing at.

KAYLEE (OS)

Cap'n!

Mal moves over to Kaylee, who is examining the metallic surface of the wall.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

This ain't no wall.

Kaylee puts her hand THROUGH the wall, touching a hidden BUTTON with a click. The wall shakes like a TV with bad reception - a holographic projection, revealing ELEVATOR DOORS that open up.

Everyone is taken aback, except Mal, who strides inside.

MAL

Let's see just how much cola they got... All aboard.

Unseen to everyone getting on the elevator - a RED LIGHT blinks to life in the far corner of the warehouse.

INT. OFFICE – DAY

A middle-aged MAN wearing a scruffy collared shirt sits behind a desk, facing a wall-mounted WAVE-BOARD. His NAME-TAG reads:

*"Dr. Josef Mathias, MD
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, AREA 54 - NEUROMANIPULATION"*

A red blinking LIGHT flashes to life on his desk. He punches a button on a keyboard, and the display reads: 'KHONSU FACILITY, UNSCHEDULED ELEVATOR ACCESS' – and below it, a real-time video-Capture of our crew in the elevator.

INT. CHIEN'S PATROL BOAT – BRIDGE

LIEUTENANT WALLACE sits at a workstation, looking at a MONITOR.

WALLACE

Sir, we've got something.

CAPTAIN CHIEN appears beside him, staring with a smile into the grainy close-up image of Mal in an elevator.

CHIEN

Seems our new... 'superior' was not wrong about tapping the good doctor's lines after all. What is Mathias doing about it?

WALLACE

Far as I can tell, sir... Nothing. He sent an encrypted burst to the base, but it appears he just turned off the alarm.

CHIEN

Typical bloody Blue Sun red tape. Can't do a thing without their higher-up's nod. If they won't deal with Reynolds, I am more than prepared, and happy to. Get a location trace on that signal.

INT. AREA 54 - MATHIAS' OFFICE – SAME TIME

Mathias talks with an older MAN (greying, 50s, well groomed, labcoat) via Wave.

MAN (via Wave)

Are there any personnel on Khonsu now?

MATHIAS

(shakes his head)

Having people around tends to... disturb the project. We redesigned the entire base to be run completely automated, remember?

MAN (via Wave)

Then this changes nothing, Josef. You know that. I realise it was never the plan for Subject Four-Five-Two-One to be released so soon, but—

MATHIAS

Too soon. You know all too well she's not stable.

MAN (via Wave)

The Board feels she is. They made their decision not to bring her in very clear to us. They feel she can serve their... interests well with her newfound, albeit premature, freedom.

MATHIAS

They're wrong, Charles - we don't know WHAT she will do! Do you know Parliament is after her?! They somehow got into our database, stole our subliminal tech, and put behavioural triggers onto the Cortex for Godsakes! You saw that stunt on Beaumonde - she could have been killed! All that work down the drain...

MAN/CHARLES (via Wave)

It is not our decision to make, I'm afraid.

Mathias cuts off the Wave.

MATHIAS

We'll see.

INT. KHONSU BASE - CORRIDOR – MOMENTS LATER

The elevator drops underground and opens in complete darkness, the only light being that of the elevator itself.

RIVER

(takes a deep breath, closes her eyes)

Out and in against a push-pull will...

As the crew edge forward, the FLOOR lights up sequentially in an eerie GREEN – as if sensing their presence. The walls, floor, and roof are all metallic, reflecting this ghostly dimness. There is no furniture, nor décor – only a long, dark, silent corridor.

A light goes on under Jayne's foot as he steps.

JAYNE

Ai ya, hwai luh! Changed my mind, Mal. I do not like this <ass backward> plan-a-yours, not by a jugfull.

MAL

Keep a lid on your can o' cuss words, Jayne... Everyone hold your peace. No sense in panic.

(to Zoe)

Pick a direction.

Zoe looks left, then right – both identical, endless black tunnels. She heads off left.

They walk along the corridor, which lights up as they go, and the area where they were standing moments before becomes dark again.

Zoe in the lead, she motions towards a DOORWAY to Mal, questioning whether to go in. Mal shrugs back – "sure, why not." Zoe opens the door – mare's leg ready.

INT. KHONSU – ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Darkness. As they step closer inside, bright white lights flicker to life. It's a sterile, metallic laboratory. Bare.

Suddenly, a meticulously dressed YOUNG WOMAN comes out of nowhere, standing before the group. Mal, Zoe and Jayne instantly raise their weapons.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hello. I am Terminal.

JAYNE

(cocking Vera)

You will be if you don't get on the ground right no-

Zoe pokes her gun through the girl, which distorts like a TV with bad reception.

ZOE

Just a holographic, Jayne. Don't wet yourself.

(looks at his pants)

Again.

JAYNE

Well, now I know that.

TERMINAL

Please state name to login.

MAL

I'm Billy,

(points at Zoe)

and this here's Butch.

Zoe gives him a look.

TERMINAL

Billybutch logged in. Processing... Unknown authenticant.
Are you a new user?

MAL

Brand-spanking.

TERMINAL

Please state intent.

MAL

Our 'intent' is to pilfer your ration stores.

TERMINAL

Unable to process request. Please restate.

MAL

We. Want. To. Rob. You.

TERMINAL

Unable to process request. Please restate.

Mal swipes a frustrated hand through the holographic girl. The image distorts for a fraction of a second then returns. Zoe gives him another "stop being silly" look.

ZOE

Terminal?

TERMINAL

Please state intent.

ZOE

Please access the facility map. Location – galley. Ration storeroom.

A three dimensional MAP appears before them, with a red arrow pointing at the storeroom.

ZOE (cont'd)

See, sir? Just have to ask nicely.

Mal smirks. Simon steps forward.

SIMON

Terminal – access all files on 'Project Catechism'.

TERMINAL

System block. User *Billybutch* not authorized.

MAL

Doc, if you don't mind, we got us some thieving to attend to. You're welcome to flirt with her all you like till we get back. But only till we get back.

ZOE

Give him time, sir. Heck, two prize-winning personalities like theirs may even hit it off.

SIMON

Funny.

Mal and Zoe grin as they walk off. Jayne joins them, but Mal puts his hand out to Jayne – 'stop'. Then points back at Simon, River, and Kaylee.

JAYNE

No ruttin' way!

MAL

Not asking.

Mal and Zoe walk out the room, into the dark depth of the corridor. Jayne trudges back to the group. Simon looks up at Terminal, then down at his closed hand. He opens it. Inside is Book's yellow paper, folded. Terminal waits patiently.

SIMON

Terminal – new user logon.

TERMINAL

Please state name to login.

Simon unfolds the paper. Reads:

SIMON

Override Passkey Alpha-Kappa-Two-Zero-Four-Seven.

TERMINAL

User logged in. MilCom Intelligence override. Full access.

INT. KHONSU - GALLEY – MOMENTS LATER

Zoe and Mal turn into a dark room that lights up brightly as they enter: a very large, sterile kitchen. A walk-in FREEZER occupies a far corner. Its door has a KEYPAD on it.

ZOE

This is it. Ration storeroom.

Zoe moves to the freezer door.

ZOE
Locked tight, sir.

MAL
Try the keypa—

Terminal suddenly appears.

TERMINAL
Hello. I am Terminal. Please state name to login.

MAL
Great...

INT. KHONSU - LAB - SAME TIME

Reams of data blur past Simon on the holographic display.

SIMON
This is incredible. There's... so much.

Kaylee sits on the floor next to Simon. Jayne stands behind them, and yawns. River paces up and down, feeling the walls – very agitated.

SIMON
Wait. Terminal – stop! Go back one page. Stop.

The text slows on-screen, and stops. It's a list of names.

SIMON (cont'd)
My God.

KAYLEE
What is it?

SIMON
River. She's been here before. I... Terminal - subject four-five-two-one. Detail.

RIVER
Four-five-two-one. Four-five-two one. I can't see me. I won't see me. I'M NOT ME!

The screen flips to a grainy black and white capture of a younger River sitting in a chair; well groomed, in a sun-dress. The heading text on the screen is:

"PROJECT ORACLE - SUBJECT 4521 - R. TAM - SESSION 001".

River stops pacing. She runs to Simon, grabbing his shirt, pulling him away.

SIMON

No, River. I need to see this.

River keeps pulling at him until Kaylee stands, and holds River tight.

KAYLEE

Jayne, why don't you and we go for a little walk, huh?

Kaylee leads River out the lab. Jayne rolls eyes, follows.

SIMON

(distant, transfixed by the image of a young River)

Don't go far...

INT. KHONSU - GALLEY – SAME TIME

Zoe and Mal face Terminal.

MAL

S'pose 'Billybutch' won't work this time?

TERMINAL

Billybutch logged in.

MAL

How 'bout being a doll'n opening this here door?

TERMINAL

System block. User Billybutch not authorized.

MAL

You're so one-dimensional, you know that?

ZOE

("You're an idiot, sir")

Good one, sir.

MAL

I thought so.

TERMINAL

Unable to process—

MAL

Goram soulless son of a...

Mal shoves his fist into the keypad—

—And all the lights go out. Besides Terminal's glow, there is complete darkness.

INTERCUT WITH SIMON:

All the lights go out around him. The only light being the holographic console.

INTERCUT WITH JAYNE/KAYLEE/RIVER:

All the lights go out around them too. Complete darkness.

ZOE (OS)
What. Did. You. *Do!*?

MAL (OS)
Nothing!

A beat of silence is broken by a distant electronic 'clang.' And another. And another. Getting louder. Closer. The sound is akin to that made by switching on high voltage stadium-type lights.

MAL (OS)
Okay, something...

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Clang. CLANG. CLANG. Coming closer and closer. We're with Jayne and Kaylee and River, but all the lights are out, so we see nothing.

JAYNE (OS)
That's it. I'm leavin'. Don't get paid near enough for this!

CLANG. CLANG.

We see down the long corridor – with each 'clang', a BLUE LIGHT FLICKERS to life on the wall, sequentially coming closer.

RIVER (OS)
(panicking)
No. Not back. Can't be. Over and over the breathing! Out and in out and in out and in!

CLANG! CLANG!

It's near. We now see the clanging is the sound of PANELS within the walls that are swivelling around to reveal CHAMBERS – shining silver pod-like tubes.

CLANG! The wall directly behind Kaylee swivels around to reveal such a chamber. We hear BREATHING.

Kaylee slowly turns around – blue light reflected in her eyes - and SCREAMS.

INT. KHONSU - GALLEY – SAME TIME

The clanging continues around Mal and Zoe. A blue light flickers on in the corridor.

ZOE
Terminal, what is happening?

TERMINAL
Automated viewing for user Alpha-Kappa-two-zero-four-seven. Subjects on display.

MAL
(to Zoe)
Could 'subjects', in any way, be something warm, fuzzy and generally good for us?

CLANG!

ZOE
Sir, when you were a child, did you maybe eat too much paste in art class?

A sharp blue light flashes across their faces.

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

FAST CAMERA PAN: Along the walls we see the chambers, the entire front of which are one-way glass WINDOWS. Inside, young BOYS and GIRLS are held naked, underwater, in apparent stasis, with tubes coming out of their mouths and arms. They all have METAL RODS in their foreheads.

Behind Kaylee a teenage BOY floats in stasis in the eerie blue light. She jumps behind Jayne.

River moves forward to the young boy, intrigued. She touches the glass.

KAYLEE
River, honey, maybe don't—

RIVER
Kyton. Class of '16. President of the Chess Club.

Jayne doesn't know what to do with himself. It takes a few seconds to get over the shock, but then his curiosity takes over and he walks up to the pod of a pretty, Asian GIRL.

He looks at her face (eventually) - up close against the glass.

JAYNE
They pickled? They look pickled.

He taps the glass.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Helloooo, little pickled girl. How are you toda—

The girl suddenly OPENS HER EYES.

Act Three

INT. CHIEN'S PATROL BOAT – SAME TIME

Chien prowls the bridge impatiently.

WALLACE

ETA eight minutes, sir. We have just received a full kill order.

CHIEN

Good. The girl is too much a threat to be allowed to live, but after all this, death is too easy for the good Captain. Kill the girl, but I need Reynolds alive.

INT. KHONSU - LAB – SAME TIME

Simon touches the holographic image of River. The still image becomes video: grainy black and white. River is being interviewed. Only the back of the interviewer's head is visible.

INTERVIEWER

...and you like school?

RIVER

(smiling)

I do! It's... sometimes things move a little slowly for me.

INTERVIEWER

I imagine they do. What's your favourite subject?

RIVER

I'm finding physics a challenge.

INTERVIEWER

You're in the graduate program already?

RIVER

(laughs)

They call me 'Little Mouse.'

INTERVIEWER

Do you think they're jealous because you're so young?

RIVER

Volker is a little... He plans to become very important.

INTERVIEWER
Did he tell you he was jealous?

RIVER
Oh, no. I just...

INTERVIEWER
You feel it.

RIVER
People tell you things all the time... without talking. The way they move,
(laughs)
The way they aren't talking.

INTERVIEWER
You're very intuitive.

RIVER
Simon says I was born with a third eye. He hates when I can tell which girls he likes.

A tear drips down Simon's face, and he touches the screen.

INTERVIEWER (hologram, OS)
Your brother... he's a doctor, right?

RIVER (hologram, OS)
He's a trauma surgeon. In Capital City.

INTERVIEWER (hologram, OS)
Quite a family.

RIVER (hologram, OS)
Simon's a genius. I could never do what he does.

Back to the screen:

INTERVIEWER
I think you can do whatever you put your mind to. That's what the Alliance needs. That's what this institute is all about... your mind - letting it do everything it could. Does that sound like something you'd be interested in?

On the video, River looks around, not sure what to answer. She looks back at the interviewer and smiles widely.

RIVER
...would I still be allowed to dance?

The video cuts off. Simon has tears streaming down his face. The clang around him barely registers.

SIMON
Terminal. Download all data on subject R. Tam.

Simon pulls out a blue-striped stylus-like DATA PEN. At the wall next to him, a PANEL flips around to reveal a COMPUTER STATION.

TERMINAL
Insert data pen.

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

River moves over to look at the girl, who looks right back at her.

RIVER
No no no - backwards breathing. Taxidermy ripe and skinned and stuffed. The insides are not inside!

KAYLEE
Oh God - she's awake!

JAYNE (into com)
("nice weather")
Mal, we got a girl in a jar here.

MAL (via com)
Good for her.

KAYLEE
(grabs the com)
She's alive, Cap'n! Shouldn't we do something?!

MAL (via com)
Absolutely. Wave with a smile as you walk on by.

KAYLEE (into com)
Captain!

MAL (via com)
Not out to save everyone in the 'Verse, Kaylee. Tried that once... We do the job we came for.

Jayne starts moving off. Kaylee stays put. The girl starts to scratch at the glass in panic.

KAYLEE (into com)
She's gonna drown, Cap'n!

INT. KHONSU – CORRIDOR/GALLEY – SAME TIME

Mal – standing before a sleeping BOY in a stasis pod - hesitates.

MAL (into com)
(not happy)

Fine. Do what you can. No one deserves to die in this place.

(turns back to Terminal)

Now I've had just about enough of you.

He whips out his pistol and starts shooting the freezer door. Sparks as the bullets ricochet.

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Kaylee pulls frantically on the chamber door, to no avail. The girl inside gets more and more frantic and starts to bang on the glass.

KAYLEE
I... can't open it!

JAYNE
(unclips his holster)
For all the gorram waste o' bullets...

INT. KHONSU - GALLEY – SAME TIME

Mal keeps on shooting dozens of bullets at the door. Terminal waits patiently. One bullet hits the keypad - sparks fly, the lights flicker, and then - the freezer opens with a soft 'click'.

MAL
See, Zoe. All you gotta do is ask nicely. With guns.

She gives him the "*mmm hmmm*" look, and they step inside the freezer.

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Jayne takes aim at the stasis chamber with Vera.

RIVER
No!

Jayne shoots, the glass shatters, and the naked girl falls to the floor with lots of water, gasping for air.

River stares at her from a distance. Kaylee runs off, leaving Jayne with the girl at his feet.

JAYNE
Uh, now what? Hey –
(after Kaylee)
Where the hell you goin'!?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits in his chair, bored, playing with his dinosaurs.

WASH
(deep, mocking Mal's voice, holding the
dinosaur in his left hand)
You must stay here by the lake, and twiddle your thumbs
for hours and hours and hours and hours! Mwahahah!
(high pitched voice, with the dinosaur
in his right hand)
But I don't even HAVE thumbs!

A loud proximity alarm goes off, giving Wash a near-heart-attack. He looks at the screen.

WASH (cont'd)
Wuh de ma <Mother of God>.

INT. KHONSU – GALLEY – SAME TIME

Mal opens a large METAL CASE – filled to the hilt with gold-bar-like RATIONS. He grins widely.

MAL
Looks like getting out of bed just became worth—

WASH (via com)
Mal, you'd better get back here *kuai* <fast>. We got trouble.

MAL
(smile fading instantly)
<Crap>!

INT. SERENITY BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash stares into the radar screen.

MAL (via com)
You want to be a little more specific than generic 'trouble',
Wash?

WASH (into com)
Alliance patroller coming down on us like a... full dog to a tree.

INT. KHONSU – GALLEY – SAME TIME

MAL (into com)
Said specific, not graphic... On our way. Warm her up.
(looks at Zoe)
And get our 'ace' ready.
(to Zoe, off her look)
Grab those rations. Time to rabbit.

He and Zoe run out the galley each carrying a metal case.

INT. KHONSU – LAB – SAME TIME

Before Simon the holo-image says "*DOWNLOADING - 42% COMPLETE*". Kaylee bursts into the room.

KAYLEE
Simon, come quick!

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Simon arrives, and stops short when he sees the girl – naked and wet on the floor.

SIMON
(in surprise)
Huh.

Simon sits her up. She is a beautiful Asian girl, about the same age as River, with long wet hair. Simon takes off Mal's red-brown shirt and wraps it around her, barely covering her.

SIMON (cont'd)
Are you... okay? What's your name?

The girl looks around wildly, disoriented.

PEARL
Pearl. Less Pearl each day. Less a girl each day.

RIVER
Nothing left of the girl.

SIMON
River!

JAYNE
I don't know, seein' a lotta girl from where I'm standing.

KAYLEE
Jayne!

SIMON
What... is this place, Pearl?

PEARL
(disoriented, to Jayne)
You're dodgy. A scaper on his own lead.

JAYNE
And you're another *fong luh* <crazy>. Jus' what we need -
more off-your-apricot fun.

River smiles. Then becomes completely serious.

RIVER
She's not half wrong, you know.

INT. KHONSU – DIFFERENT PART OF THE CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Mal and Zoe race down the long passageway, lined on each side by a stasis pod in a blue halo of light. While running:

ZOE
Sir, about the backup plan...

MAL
I think it's fast becoming the frontup plan, Zoe.

ZOE
This is a line we need to be sure we want to cross... Are
we?

No response. More silent running.

ZOE (cont'd)
Just sayin', sometimes, a man fights so hard for what's
his, he ends up giving it away in the process.

MAL
It? You mean River?

ZOE
I mean you.

Mal slows as words sink in. Then he rushes to catch up with Zoe.

INT. KHONSU - CORRIDOR – MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Zoe rush in, each carrying a metal case. Mal stops short when he sees the girl half-wrapped in his shirt. She is lying in a position reminiscent of how River was lying in the stasis pod in the series pilot.

MAL
(in surprise)
Huh.

JAYNE
(bored)
Mal, Pearl, Pearl Mal. She's our new best friend in the whole wide world. Oh – and also neck and neck with our River here in the crazy race.

MAL
(to Pearl)
A pleasure.
(tosses Jayne the case of rations)
Time to go.

SIMON
Five more minutes. I need to download more data...
There's so much.

MAL
No. No time. Take what you got and get.

KAYLEE
What is it?

MAL
Alliance on our six.

Jayne's eyes roll back in frustration. Kaylee and Simon's both go wide with panic. Everyone starts picking up to go. Kaylee looks down at Pearl, who is still weak, lying on the ground.

KAYLEE
Cap'n? What about Pearl? We can't just leave her here?!

JAYNE
An' jus' why the holy hell not?

KAYLEE
She's helpless!

JAYNE
She's a guinea pig. No tellin' what's inside a her.

SIMON
Like River?

RIVER
(smiling)
Like me!

Mal thinks a moment. Looks down at Pearl, who is looking back up at him.

MAL

Mal picks Pearl up and hoists her over his shoulder.

ZOE
Move out.

The crew move down the long corridor towards the elevator.

INT. KHONSU - ELEVATOR – SAME TIME

They're all inside the elevator. As the doors close—

RIVER

—and she squeezes between the closing doors. Mal bolts after her, but before anyone else can react, the doors slam tight.

SIMON KAYLEE
Stop! We gotta go back!

JAYNE

Why? We got us a all new crazy girl!

INT. KHONSU - SIDE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mal enters the room. Sees River standing at a glass REFRIGERATOR, looking in. He grabs River by her handcuffs, but she resists, pointing at the fridge.

RIVER
(points)

River opens the refrigerator. Cold steam hisses out. She reaches in and grabs a BOX filled with SYRINGES containing a GREEN FLUID. She hands the box to Mal.

RIVER (cont'd)

Mal stares at the box.

MAL
Super. Can we go now?

INT. KHONSU – GROUND LEVEL- WAREHOUSE – MOMENTS LATER

The elevator arrives at the top level with a ping. Mal and River get out, Mal holding the box in his hands. Simon and Jayne wait at the elevator door, and as she steps out, Simon scoops her into his arms. Serenity's engines whine at the other end of the warehouse.

MAL (into com)
Okay, Wash, we're here. Ready her for takeoff.

WASH (via com)
I lost the patrol boat, Mal. It came close, and blipped...
no, bleeped off our radar. Definitely bleeped.

Mal, Jayne, Simon and River make it halfway across the crate-filled warehouse to Serenity's ramp. The airlock door is open, Zoe waiting for them.

MAL
(shouting to Zoe)
Secure the goods. Get—

CHIEN (OS)
Captain Reynolds!

Mal spins around: Chien stands at the far end of the large warehouse, grinning.

CHIEN (cont'd)
Or do you prefer Harbatkin? Pitensky, Shan, or Jericho?
Or any other numerous aliases you've no doubt taken
over the years? Whatever you wish to call yourself,
Captain - you are finally bound by law.

Act Four

INT. KHONSU – WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Chien and Mal face each other over the expanse of the warehouse. Neither moves. Simon, River and Jayne stand behind Mal.

CHIEN
I must say, Captain, you do visit the strangest places.

MAL

Well, see the sights, as they say.

CHIEN

It almost feels an honour to be in your presence. You've become... a holy grail, of sorts. Quite the challenge it's been even proving your existence.

MAL

I'm sorry, all you Purpies look the same. Who're you again?

CHIEN

The man who's spent the better part of a year tracking you and your ship across the border worlds.

MAL

A year!? Sounds like someone needs a hobby.

CHIEN

And now I'll have the time to take one up. Perhaps chess.

MAL

How special for you. We about done here?

CHIEN

I think so.

MAL

Good.

Mal quickly reaches for his gun. Chien gives a hand signal and a LASER BEAM comes out of nowhere, hits Mal's holster, which falls to the floor, on fire.

A dozen laser SIGHTS dot over Mal's chest and head.

CHIEN

Now, are you going to come willingly?

MAL

(getting angry, stepping forward)

Choo fay wuh suh luh <over my rotting carcass>.

CHIEN

What is it exactly that you wish to achieve? What is your grand plan at this very moment? You are outnumbered, and outgunned, Captain.

Behind Chien, a dozen Alliance troops pour out from behind the cola crates. Each raises a silver laser-rifle at Mal.

JAYNE
Aw, hell. Was willing to take on one...

Mal looks down at his flaming holster.

CHIEN
(smiling)
Give up now and I'll see to it your trial is fair and your crew goes free.

MAL
Mighty generous of you...
(uncuffs River)
Though I have myself another notion.
(into com)
Wash! Ace in the hole!

Serenity's engines suddenly release a vast amount of thick white SMOKE, filling the warehouse. No one can see clearly more than a few feet in front of their own faces. There are laser sights flitting through the fog scanning for targets to no avail.

CHIEN (OS)
(shouting)
Fire at will!

The area explodes with laser gun fire and gun fire - laser beams going everywhere, but no hits because of the fog.

Suddenly the "Fruity Oaty Bar" commercial is HOLO-PROJECTED into the fog. The fog lights up in full color video.

SERENITY'S SPEAKER
Fruity Oaty Bars make a man out of a mouse...

Simon looks up, shocked, at the source of the projection - Serenity's bridge.

SERENITY'S SPEAKER
Fruity Oaty Bars make you jump out of your blouse...

SIMON
(angry, panicking)
No! You *ta ma de!* How can you do this to h-

Mal suckerpunches Simon. He goes down, and Mal grips him by the back of his neck, dragging him back towards Serenity.

SERENITY'S SPEAKER
Eat 'em all the time...

Jayne starts smiling when he sees the Oaty Bar commercial, but it is short lived, because a laser beam grazes him in the shoulder, searing his flesh. He reflexively drops Vera as he falls back in pain, and then looks up in the direction of the fire.

JAYNE
(to himself, pulling the pin out a grenade)
S'better to give than to receive.

SERENITY'S SPEAKER
Let 'em blow your mind...

He tosses the grenade in the general direction of the Alliance troops. It flies through the fog, distorting the projected image of the purple Oaty-Pus.

SERENITY'S SPEAKER
Blow your little mind.

BOOM! A flash of grenade. Then nothing. Then the lasers resume firing in Serenity's direction – though somewhat less of them.

Jayne retreating back into the cargo bay, Mal providing cover fire from the ramp, and Zoe from inside the cargo bay, leaving River in a haze of fog - mesmerized by the commercial. Once Jayne stumbles in, Mal punches the button to close the cargo bay doors with one hand, holding Simon in a lock with the other.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

Simon desperately tries to get out the doors as Mal holds him while the doors close. We see River disappear into the fog.

SIMON
Chiang-BAO HOE-tze de hwoon dahn! <Monkey raping bastard!>

ZOE
Captain didn't have a choice!

INT. KHONSU - WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

River is hypnotised by the commercial.

FLASHCUTS: Images flash fast through RIVER'S MIND: Screaming and dried, decayed bodies... and a Reaver!

RIVER
(whispers)
Miranda.

River leaps into the fog.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

The entire crew arrive to watch, as River leaps into the fog.

JAYNE
C'mon, Wash! Let's go gorramit!

SIMON
(shouting, hand on the glass)
You are NOT leaving her here, you bastard! You hear me!?

MAL
Hold on, Wash.

INT. KHONSU - WAREHOUSE – SAME TIME

CHIEN (into com)
All teams! Hold your fire or you'll shoot one another!

Chien is flanked by two Alliance soldiers, weapons raised, moving cautiously through the fog. It's all very silent.

SOLDIER 1
Where the *guay* are they?

ELSEWHERE IN THE FOG: A lone soldier, separated from his team. Rapid, loud breathing. He looks around wildly in all different directions – when a bare foot appears behind his head.

SOLDIER 2 (into com)
Captain Chien? This is Corporal Suen. Do you copy?

BACK WITH CHIEN:

CHIEN (into com)
This is Chien, Copy. You have a conta—

Over the com comes SCREAMING, the sound of lasers searing the air, then static.

ELSEWHERE IN THE FOG: We can't see much, but we HEAR the sounds of fists hitting skin, and gunfire. We see only muzzle flash and shadow. River is everywhere and nowhere.

Chien looks behind him: the two soldiers are GONE.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

SIMON
(staring through the glass)
Oh God, she's just a child—

Chien suddenly flies out of the fog into the far wall, where he loses consciousness.

MAL
Poor helpless little babe...

Silence. Wash punches a button.

The warehouse doors open, the fog lifts, and River stands alone around a bunch of soldiers strewn across the warehouse. The beat of calm is quickly broken by—

INT. KHONSU - WAREHOUSE – SAME TIME

—Chien's PATROL BOAT, as it drops into view behind Serenity. Through its bridge window, we see Wallace. A GATLING GUN lowers quickly out of the ship's belly, turns and takes aim at River.

A beat. QUICK CUT CLOSE UPS: River/The Gatling gun/Vera – lying on the ground a hundred feet away. A momentary standoff.

Then the Gatling gun FIRES at a blinding rate. River sprints – bullets hot on her tail. As she runs, she kicks Vera—lying where Jayne dropped her—up into her waiting hands.

Mid stride, a BULLET catches her ankle – blood sprays, and she trips for only a second, not slowing down. Then, without turning to look, River aims Vera at the patrol boat.

And SHOOTS. Multiple shots while running – each making holes in the WINDOW of the bridge. Inside, Wallace goes down in a spray of blood.

The patrol boat rapidly veers off.

River then turns. And takes aim at Serenity's bridge...

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal stares at River, who calmly aims Vera at the forward viewport.

MAL
Now, Wash!

WASH
(into the loudspeaker)
Eta kooram nah smechn!

River, mid stride, drops to the ground. Simon turns away from the viewport to look at Mal in disgust.

MAL
What? Worked, didn't it? I checked it out. It's old Russian
- means something about a laughing chicken.

WASH
(breaking the tension)
Have you ever heard a chicken laugh? I certainly haven—

Simon punches Mal square in the jaw. He goes down.

SIMON
It means "*that's ridiculous*".

Simon storms off.

MAL
(standing, rubbing his face)
S'pose I did rightly deserve that one.

EXT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – NIGHT

Jude and Inara walk the grounds, arm-in-arm, each holding a glass of wine. They are both smiling, laughing. Inara appears more than a little tipsy.

INARA
You think that? You REALLY think that?
(Jude nods; Inara shakes her head)
What I would give to put you and Mal in a bottle and shake it right up!

JUDE
Mal? That was the name of your captain, yes?

INARA
No. Yes. Well not my captain, but yes, Malcolm Reynolds.

JUDE
And you think he and I...

INARA
(babbling)
I think that the two of you would tear each other to tiny shreds. Mal... he's an Independent. A bona-fide Browncoat in the war. The name of his ship—*Serenity*—should tell you what you need to know... If he heard you say what you just said, well... whatever happened next, it would be interesting.

JUDE
He'd fight me out of misplaced honour?

INARA
He'd fight.

JUDE
Is he well-schooled in the martial arts?

INARA
(laughs)
Home-schooled, more like. You should have seen him in a real-honest-to-God duel!

JUDE
Pistols or swords?

INARA
Swords.

JUDE
Interesting. He sounds like a most surprising gentleman.

INARA
What's surprising is that he is a gentleman. Sometimes.

JUDE
You seem quite fond of him.

Inara looks Jude in the eye. They are close. The wind blows her hair.

INARA
I was...

INT. KHONSU - WAREHOUSE – MINUTES LATER

Chien comes to his senses - sees his men on the floor, and then sees Serenity is no longer there. Holding his head with one hand, he pushes his com.

CHIEN
Wallace – after them. They cannot get away!

Static.

CHIEN (cont'd)
Wallace?

INT. MATHIAS' OFFICE – DAY

Mathias is talking to the same man as earlier (Charles), via Wave.

CHARLES (via Wave)
You remotely activated one of the Gui!?

MATHIAS
I sent her with a retrieval program, yes.

(off the man's angry look)
I couldn't sit back and do nothing, Charles! She's our own
creation, in a way. I cannot allow the Parliament to just...
take aim and destroy our creation!

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

River, still unconscious, lies in the main bed and Pearl, sleeps soundly in the side bed. Simon cleans up River's new cuts and scrapes. The box of green syringes lies on the table behind them.

CHARLES (VO)
(sigh)
And your 'solution', Josef, is to release another subject?
Now we have two loose cannons—

MATHIAS (VO)
Hardly a loose cannon. I've worked with this one myself.

CLOSEUP: The sleeping Pearl.

MATHIAS (VO, cont'd)
She's ready...

BLACKOUT